"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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The Spiritual Basis of a Comprehensive or "Larger Parish" Program*

By Arthur T. Mosher**

The spiritual basis of the comprehensive program we discuss here is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. It is a staggering acknowledgment that this program ought to embody and present, not primarily the most modern methods of education, the most advanced programs of public health, the most efficient methods of cultivation, nor effective measures for promoting community solidarity, nor even a well-balanced combination of all of these, but the pure and comprehensive will of Eternal God for people living on the land. The task of our program is not to be a comprehensive omnibus of all good rural programs, but comprehending the Gospel and the nature of rural living, to present the God of Jesus Christ in terms which our generation can understand. Perhaps we ought to use the word "comprehending," rather than "comprehensive." The Christian Rural Mission is what its name says it is, only when its impact on the countryside brings the amazed reply: "Your Master is the Christ!" There have been times when you and I, to use the words of James Clarke, "have heard the tides of the Infinite roll up the remote beaches of our souls." To bring that experience to rural people, and to help them express their answering allegiance in effective discipleship, is the purpose of the Christian Rural Mission.

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*This paper was presented at the Rural Missions Conference held at the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University, January 23-24, 1942. The general topic of the Conference was "Christian Mission Strategy in Rural Areas--The Comprehensive or 'Larger Parish' Program." The basis of the discussion centered about one of the recommendations of the Madras meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1938, as follows:

"The idea of the comprehensive community or parish program needs wider study and demonstration, until it becomes a part of the thinking and life of the rural church everywhere. The comprehensive program includes: better agriculture, better health, better recreation, better homes, better economic organization, the widening of intellectual horizons, the enrichment of rural life through music, drama and other forms of the arts, the development of community spirit, as well as the vitally important work of Christian preaching and teaching, and guidance in worship, fellowship and service."

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If it had been the intention that this part of our conference program should be an exposition of the Christian faith, someone else would have been chosen to lead it. Your task and mine is rather to consider the question: What are the implications for the Christian rural program of the fact that it is meant to be the Christian program for people living on the land? We ought to recognize that we are not well equipped to do this. Predominantly we are of one of two temperaments. Some of us tend to assume (perhaps because Jesus seemed intuitively always to have taken the right course) that we need only face the world with a sincere love of God and man in our hearts and the activities we develop will be bound to reflect the will of God, no matter how involved the problem or how unique the situation. Others of us, realizing the necessity for critical analysis both of current problems and of the attitude which truly impelled the heart of Christ, become so engrossed in analysis and application that we wind up with what must be, to all appearances, a humanistic program for rural improvement. Moreover, while analyzing the problems of our generation, on the one hand, and seeking to penetrate the mind of Christ on the other, we spend too little time trying to synthesize these in our Christian rural program.

I should like to illustrate this by pointing out two questions, questions which are of crucial importance in determining the form of the Christian rural program, yet questions which we too seldom ponder and discuss.

First, what is the role of the Church in rural society? Do we believe the function of the Church to be to control the life of a community, or to leaven it? Four years ago, a prominent mission executive wrote this:

> "The Larger Parish is a geographical and population unity where each individual, home and locality is to receive exactly the same pastoral care and religious oversight.... Its real genius and purpose are: first, a ministry over areas as well as churches, and, second, a major emphasis upon populations instead of (on) 'constituencies.'"

That statement has a prominent position in the literature of rural missions. Many of our current programs are based on this principle. Clearly, he who wrote it saw the Church as the focal center, the controlling influence in the community. Personally, I am convinced that, with notable exceptions, the Church cannot, in the near future, if it portrays fully the Christian Gospel, dominate whole geographical communities, and that in trying to dominate communities it is likely to forfeit its opportunity to leaven them. We wish it were not so. We wish it had not been necessary for Jesus to tell the parable of the sower, that there were no stony soil and no thistles. But there are, and our formulation of the Christian rural program must respect that fact. Is it the task of the Church in rural society to seek to dominate geographical communities, or is its task to keep throwing out into communities incarnations of God, consecrated, enthusiastic--and trained in effective techniques of discipleship? The answer we give will have a considerable influence on the character of the Christian rural program.

Second, what is the role of the individual Christian in rural society? Every once in a while we see listed as an item of a comprehensive Christian program the desire to make people better citizens of their communities and of their nations. Do we really mean "better citizens," or do we mean "Christian residents"?

Every person is a part of his community. Our Master taught us that it is in our social contacts, our business transactions, our political relationships,

Another part of our interpretation of the Gospel in terms of modern rural living must be an emphasis on stewardship: of time, of productive resources, of personal abilities.

Whatever the prevailing economic system or habit of the world may be, the Christian will produce primarily to meet a need of people. The Christian farmer farms to produce food, to feed people. The Christian shoe-maker makes shoes that people may be shod. The Christian doctor practises medicine that people may have health. If a farmer, having been given 365 days in each year, or 313 excluding Sundays, in which to produce food, proceeds to work at his job only 150 days, he is an unprofitable servant; he is a poor steward. Agricultural improvement for that man is not primarily a matter of increasing his income, or of building an economic base for the Church; it is a matter of Christian stewardship. He has abilities and resources which he is not using.

The basis of many Christian activities which resemble secular rural improvement programs is in Christian stewardship. Here is the foundation in the Gospel for many activities into which allegiance to Jesus Christ has forced us, yet which because of the lack of a fuller explanation of stewardship in our presentation of the Gospel, have been forced into a secular position.

There is a bud on the tree of the Christian program, out of which it was intended that there should grow the branch of stewardship. That branch will bear the fruit of health, nurtured by a knowledge of hygiene and sanitation, food and nutrition, and by the practice of scientific medicine. It will bear the fruit of efficient production of material goods, nurtured by technical skill and the desire to use most fully our talents of time and of productive resources. It will bear the fruit of highly trained and consecrated workers in industry, commerce, education, politics, the arts, motivated by their desire to be good stewards of their personal abilities. Until that branch develops as it should, the tree of the Christian program does not fully represent the Christian Gospel. Our program in rural areas must include, in its interpretation of the Gospel, an increased, enlarged, realistic emphasis on stewardship of health, of personal abilities, of time, of productive resources.

Having impressed upon us the organic place which stewardship holds in the Gospel, the Christian rural program must go on, as a third phase, to insure provision of opportunities for developing the necessary tools of stewardship. We have long made provision in the program for developing physical and mental abilities, but we have not made it sufficiently clear that their purpose is the implementation of stewardship, of discipleship. As long as this weakness exists, there will remain the tendency for training to become secular, and for students to forget their faith in their absorption in new knowledge, because the purpose of providing education, of becoming educated, was not made sufficiently clear to them by an adequate attention to stewardship of abilities in the Christian program by which they were nurtured.

Every sincere citizen of the Kingdom is compelled to search his body and mind for potential abilities to heal the sick of body or the sick of spirit, to blot out the possibility of hungry mouths, to ease the burden of economic inequality, to cleanse political institutions. He must take upon himself the responsibility for developing his latent abilities, for training his fingers to agility, for sharpening his mind for incisive thinking and for equipping it with the tools of knowledge, for sensitizing his understanding to the ills, and needs, and possibilities of his fellow-men.

itself commits us. I believe we will conclude that it commits us to four activities: first, to teaching the Bible; second, to interpreting the Gospel in terms of modern rural living; third, to developing skill in the use of tools by which Christian stewardship can be accomplished; fourth, to establishing personal and group habits of worship which will conserve, enrich and develop Christian experience.

We would all agree that the Christian rural program must include teaching the Bible. A second function must be the interpretation of the Gospel in terms of modern rural living, particularly its implications for morality in our day, and its teaching on stewardship: stewardship of health, of time, of productive resources, of personal ability.

This interpretation of the morality taught by the Gospel must include an explanation of the moral issues involved in many of the impersonal relationships of modern economic and political life. The Christian conscience has awakened, chiefly during the past generation, to the realization that we may commit murder quite as truly by the way we spend our money as with a knife or a gun. We have learned that a personality can be as effectively outraged by conditions of employment as by rape. We have come to know that living behind discriminatory tariff walls can be a moral equivalent of gathering together an abundance of the material goods of life and retiring within a well guarded home, while one's brothers are undernourished and insufficiently clad in the streets outside. This new awareness does not mean that the Gospel has changed. It is the same Gospel. But we have come to see that in the complex life of today new expressions, new tools, new avenues of Christian love are essential. This is as true for farmers in India, and in the United States, and in Brazil, as it is for machinists in Detroit.

Is it not true that the need of our generation is for clarification of a Christian ethic which can be applied effectively by individuals living in a groupistic society? The extent to which the so-called social gospel fails is the extent to which it seeks to impose Christian ethical standards through the action of secular social and political groups, (as when we seek peace through disarmament conferences, and economic justice through the socialist party). The extent to which the so-called personal gospel fails is the extent to which it ignores the groupistic nature of the modern society in which we live. The individual is still the primary agent of morality, but his morality must be expressed in techniques relevant to the groupistic society of which he is a part. We need somehow to get into our application of Christian morality that comprehension which John Donne expressed in his paragraph made popular by Ernest Hemingway's novel:

> "No man is an islande, entire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the continent, a part of the maine. If a clod bee washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontorie were, as well as if a mannor of thy friends or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

A farmer in North India wishing to be a Christian, must realize the moral issue involved in raising sugar-cane, for which India is poorly endowed by Nature, with high tariff protection, while his neighbors in Java and Cuba suffer because of a glutted market. But he must be equipped with a technique which he can himself employ without having first to change the tariff policy of the Government of India.

that our discipleship must be, if it is to be, expressed. It is in these community contacts that the Christian must live out his life. It is in these councils of men that he must proclaim the Gospel of the Christ. But notice that to do this he must live by eternal standards in a temporal world. To use the title of a fine short story, he must be "The Man Who Lives In Eternity Now." He actually must be "in the world but not of it." Is this "good citizenship," in its commonly accepted meaning?

My understanding of the role of the individual Christian in rural society is that he is, first, to seek to understand the community life of which he is inextricably a part, as the field in which his discipleship must be expressed, and he is, second, to participate in that common life as nearly as he can according to a divine pattern, strengthened by divine resources. He is to be a saint. Sainthood is not a matter, in the words of John Mackay, of "cadaverous hermits in the wilderness or of cloistered angels in their customary close." It is "a mandate for the many," for every Christian, for common men and women, "exemplifying in their everyday lives the compassion and forgiveness of God, and the sovereign mastery of human life by Jesus Christ."

Some of us believe that that is what the Christian rural mission ought to be trying to produce, that the measure of the success of the Christian rural mission is the extent to which men and women dot the agricultural villages of earth doing greater works than these, men and women who are living in eternity now, saints teaching the children, and shaping the plows, and fashioning the shoes, and washing the clothes, and watering the fields of earth. It makes considerable difference to the Christian rural program what answer we give to the question: What is the role of the individual Christian in rural society?

These two questions are indicative of what must be a long list to which you and I assume answers when we talk about the Christian rural program. One of our tasks as missionaries is that of continually pondering and re-examining these fundamental interpretations of the Christian faith, to the end that our program may be valid.

But even in the midst of this continual re-examination of our basic interpretations, we must formulate a program to express our faith. Paradoxically, our program can only be valid when based on true interpretations, while true interpretations seem to grow only out of experience in putting an assumed program into practice. Therefore, we turn to our main question: What will be the program of the Christian rural mission?

It is easy to state what it will not be. It will not be an inclusive secular program of rural improvement plus a department of religion. It is not a program of improvement or reconstruction at all, but of Christian discipleship. It must have no activity, no emphasis, which does not grow out of the Gospel itself, which is not essential to proclaiming and interpreting the Good News. The secular solution of social, economic and political problems is itself a practice to be challenged and transformed by the Gospel. No secular program of rural development can be made "Christian" by the addition of a minister. Because when we departmentalize any program so that part of it pursues economic, social and political goals in a secular manner, while another part attempts to supplement this by religious teaching, the result is an inner conflict in the program. A secular approach and a religious attitude are incompatible. So let us abandon the idea that a secular rural program can become Christian by adding a department of religion, and seek to discover to what activities in rural areas, the Gospel

Finally, our Christian rural program must provide for establishing personal and group habits of prayer, study, worship, and expression which will conserve the teaching given, support a sustained discipleship, and inspire to the discovery of new implications of the Gospel. When we enlarge and enrich our emphasis on stewardship, and when we incorporate into our interpretation of the Gospel the moral implications of group relationships of our social, economic and political life, we must be sure that our enriched program of teaching is reflected by the practices and liturgies we employ in personal devotions and in congregational worship. The great ages of the Church are those when, to use the phrase of Dr. C. C. Morrison, the dreams of the prophets become "the confessional utterances of every worshipping congregation."

Our rural program must provide for establishing personal and group habits of prayer, worship, and group expression which explicitly state that the production of shoes of food, of baskets, of cloth, of pottery, of plows is a service rendered to God through ministering to one's neighbor. We have had this explicitness in regard to personal contacts; we need more of it expressing stewardship and morality in a groupistic society. Each Christian must be made to see, through its place in public worship, that the dedication of one's fields to the service of Christ is an integral part of acceptance of the Christian faith. Our responsive readings, our prayers, our hymns must reflect the imperative of stewardship of health, of utilization of time, of conservation and dedication of productive resources, of the development of personal abilities. We cannot build our ceremonies around a single phase of the Gospel, yet expect our presentation to result in an honest discipleship. If we want our program to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ we must so select our ceremonies, our vocabulary, our hymns, our devotional practices, our orders of worship, that every implication of the full Gospel blossoms truly and logically out of the devotional habits and worship literature of the people.

The comprehensive program of the Christian rural mission is not different from other comprehensive programs simply in its motive; it is an entirely different program. When applied to a secular program, the word "comprehensive" means all-inclusive, all-around, ministering to the "whole man," to the "whole community." If it is to be applied at all to the program of the Christian rural mission, it must be interpreted to mean complete, or whole, in the sense that the program presents the "whole Gospel," the whole implication of the will of God for people living on the land, implications respecting the relationship between man and God, between man and man, between man and ideas, between man and material things.

Accurately to determine many of these implications, and to develop in people the tools of Christian discipleship, demands a division of labor between specialists in many fields. And these specialists need to be more highly trained than we have usually assumed. We do not place a man in charge of a mission hospital because, as a Boy Scout, he earned a merit badge in First Aid. Yet many of us working on social and economic implications of the Gospel are in the Boy Scout stage. We sometimes outline programs which would have as fatal results as the removal of a gall bladder by a blacksmith. We badly need highly-expert personnel in special fields--men who, to use a familiar phrase, "think like men of action, and act like men of thought." (From Thomas Mann)

But that program which we subdivide for analysis, we must re-assemble before it leaves our hands. At the point at which the Christian rural program touches the countryside it must be one program, an integrated program, a religious program, and it must be transmitted through a specialist in integration, perhaps the local pastor, perhaps a trained layman, who may not know as much Greek, and monetary science, and animal genetics, and educational theory, and liturgical history, as some of those who have helped to formulate the program, but who, like the people with whom he lives, has had to integrate all of these into a unified outlook, who has learned to see what a certain change in one field will involve in other phases of our complex, interdependent common life, who has combined the metals of many specialties into the fine alloy of effective discipleship.

The specialization within the Christian rural program must be deep inside of it. It must be the arteries, the nerves, the muscles of the program, not the face and hands and bearing. The face of the program must be the face of the Christ it serves, its hands must be those of the servant, its bearing must be that of the majesty and eternity of God.

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